The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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DEAR MEMBER,

An account of conditions in China is given in the following letter from my friend Geoffrey Allen, who has just returned to this country. He was Fellow and Chaplain of Lincoln College, Oxford, and went out to China five years ago to teach in the Union Theological Seminary in Canton, which owing to war conditions has had to be transferred to the western province of Yunnan.

THE SITUATION IN CHINA

He writes: " Politically, there is still in China a very strong will to resist in the interior. Sometimes it takes forms which I wish were more likely to be fulfilled than they seem. When for instance my Chinese friends say they will not yield even to the Japanese occupation of Manchuria, I think they are expecting something which on a realist view seems very far beyond their present strength. China is strong enough to hold out against Japan and harass Japan for a long time; it seems very doubtful if she is strong enough to take back the coast ports and the rivers against the strength of the Japanese fleet. It is likely to be a deadlock and a stalemate for many years, unless of course the war in the East lined up with the war in the West, and Japan had to face the American fleet on her lines of communication.

" The sufferings of the war are such as to make England seem luxurious. Where we were in Yunnan, the price of rice was twelve times its proper price. In the North war combines with flood; and people are said to be glad to eat chaff or the husks of peanuts. England has seen a little of evacuation problems. When Canton fell, the government said to a city of a million inhabitants, the city is going to be fired to-morrow morning; the city must be empty by dawn. Our own evacuation six months later meant a journey of four or five days by ship, three days by railway, two days by bus, and a further day by horse. It is good that people in England should know and face facts like these. In many parts of England there is as yet very little deliberate sacrificial suffering, apart from enforced sufferings through raids. It is well we should realise how much more we can suffer if we are called to, and still preserve intact everything in life which is of real and ultimate value.

" The problem of the occupied areas is still acute in China. It raises acute issues between political loyalties, and Christian universal loyalties to the destitute, regardless of political creed. It is difficult to get even some of the best of Chinese leaders to recognise a real responsibility for the mass of the destitute who are left in the occupied areas. They lack the centuries of Christian training on the rights of the individual. It is all too common to get a subconscious feeling that the coolie is not of real value to the life of the nation; and that therefore the sufferings or death of a few hundred thousand of the bottom class does not really matter or count. Yet the masses of the destitute are left in the occupied area. They need rice, and they need some kind of order and law. If these are not supplied in any other way, they will be supplied by the Japanese. Those whose only consideration is to wonder where their next meal will come from will inevitably be influenced by those who in fact provide their rice.

" For these reasons I regard as some of the real heroes of the war the handful of Chinese Christian clergy and doctors who have stayed on in the occupied areas to stand by the destitute there. It is said rather too easily by Chinese who have moved from the areas that all leaders who stay are puppets and traitors. But there can and should be a motive to stay and work on in occupied areas out of loyalty to the destitute Chinese. It is however rare to get any educated Chinese who will agree with this point. Yenching is a rare exception, disliked in most of the rest of China, when it keeps University work going under Japanese rule.

" In this situation my main impression all through the war is how God redeems and overrules evil, and makes the wrath of man turn to His praise. Suffering, accepted and borne, does redeem. In all sorts of ways the day of intense suffering in China is proving a day of intense opportunity for Christian forward work. In the occupied areas, both missionaries and the Chinese Christian doctors and clergy have done admirable sacrificial service. Their heroism and their witness is having its effect. It is making the hesitant onlooker say that, if in the midst of suffering those who are touched by the spirit of Christ stay to serve when they were free to go, there must be more in this Christian movement than we knew.

" One thing of abiding worth in the whole situation is the new-found co-operation between different Christian groups. In Canton we had a situation, where nothing but faultless co-operation of every available Christian resource could have coped with the need. We had to feed twenty thousand refugees at about a day's notice, with a complete breakdown of every kind of public service. The need drew out the response. We forgot every other difference. We discovered our unity at the place where all our varying faiths became one, the common love of Christ and the common service in His Name toward the destitute. For six months I worked myself as secretary of the international and inter-denominational refugee committee ; and every Christian group, including all those normally furthest apart, worked as a perfect team. The Roman Catholics were especially good. They worked side by side in one team with the larger Reformed Churches, the Salvation Army and small Adventist sects. We federated all relief work under one central committee. Through this committee we had a common policy for all common concerns, such as the purchase and distribution of food and negotiations with the Japanese. For efficiency we delegated subordinate control wherever we could. As one instance, the Salvation Army had complete control of all the running of one refugee camp ; this gave them one camp in which they could run services and evangelism after their own customs. Through the urgency of the time and the team work together we all found new friendships with members of other Churches, which will last with us through the rest of our lives. I think of one Salvation Army captain, going out under fire to fetch supplies with a Roman priest, and coming back and saying he had no idea a Roman priest could be such a grand and loving companion. The Romans on their side, when we later moved our union college to Yunnan, wrote to their church there, saying how much they had valued co-operation with us in Canton and asking their people in Yunnan to give us every facility and help they could if we came their way.

" It is a day of immense need and immense opportunity for Christian work in China. I long that the older Churches may rise to the opportunity. After five years in China, I feel that many things need reforming in mission education, policy and strategy. Far too much mission thinking and planning at home is related to the Church overseas as it was fifty years ago, rather than as it is today. In particular, a far more specialist type of missionary is wanted, as the younger churches pass from infancy to adolescence, and therefore need more mature teachers. This in turn means new methods of appointment, by which in the Church overseas, as in the Church at home, picked people are selected and placed in picked specialist posts. Far too often, people are holding posts in Universities in China because the mission has a stake in the college rather than because

they were people who would have been given such an appointment in America or England. And the opening in the new Chinese Government Universities is as yet almost entirely neglected.

" When I say things like this to my Chinese friends in educational work, always they warmly agree. When I say it at home, it is too often regarded as a new and unwelcome view. The fact is that in the world Church and its organisation, precisely as in the birth of a new international and political order in the West, a new world is coming to birth. In both fields, a few sentences along this kind of line seem to drive a wedge between those who are thinking in terms of ten or fifty years ago, and those who are thinking in terms of the present and of ten years ahead."

THE CHURCH OF GREECE APPEALS TO CHRISTENDOM

The following is part of a message addressed by the Orthodox Church of Greece to all Christian Churches throughout the world over the signature of Chrysanthos, Archbishop of Athens and Primate of Greece, and circulated by Reuter :

" The Church of Greece feels that it is its duty to arraign before Christian Churches throughout the world this wanton and godless onslaught of fire and destruction on the part of fascist Italy; and it is sure that you of Churches bound by those common ties of fellowship which ever unite members of one body, will rise up in your indignation and denounce these shameful acts, seeing in them indeed the uprooting of all law, human and divine.

" They are an aggressive challenge, an insufferable insult, to the decency of all free peoples. The church of Greece entreats you that, moved with the zeal of Christ, you may lift up your voices in protest and stir your peoples to indignation of a measure equal to the offence, so that all may learn to look upon the despoiler as their common foe and stand forth as a mighty shield before those that suffer injustice. Let them defend the ancient and unassailable principles of the Christian faith. For these principles—Justice, Freedom, Truth and Love—our Lord gave His life, and He established His church to guard them and to watch over Christian civilisation. Let us pray with all the strength that is granted to us, that the Lord may cause the furious ragings of the nations to cease and give back to the peoples of the earth the freedom, peace and blessings of His Kingdom."

REPRISALS

One of our members, who has been travelling up and down the country, told me the other day that he finds almost everywhere an inability to see any moral distinction between the blockade and deliberate, indiscriminate bombing, and a general desire that " the Germans should be given a taste of their own medicine." Some sections of the press are clamouring for recourse to unrestrained frightfulness. This is sheer Nazism. In the early days of the News-Letter I called attention to the danger that under the strain of war the spirit of Nazism might subtly enter into us, so that even if we gained victory on the battlefield the evil which we took up arms to resist would have won its hellish triumph. The danger has become a serious reality.

If war is waged at all, the pursuit of its military objectives must be relentless. But if it ceases to be the necessary, though hateful, servant of a high purpose, and is allowed to become our master, we become the deluded victims of a blind fate.

Why does it matter whether we win the war? Because we believe that this country is standing for something of spiritual value to mankind. If we do not stand for that, it is from the standpoint of world history a matter of indifference whether we win or lose.

The question whether we can wage the war and keep our purpose high is the question whether men generally will sink to the level of beasts of prey or hold to the things that make them men—mercy and compassion, the love of justice and truth. It is the question whether civilisation is going to be betrayed by its professed defenders. And for those who

are Christians it is the question whether Christ is to be betrayed, denied and crucified afresh by His professed disciples. If that betrayal takes place, we can bury our hopes of a better order of society which might compensate for the horrors and sufferings of the war.

What is the Christian News-Letter for unless we mean business over this question? Are you resolved to exert your influence to the utmost to stem the rising tides of passion and hate, and to do battle for our spiritual heritage with something of the high-hearted gallantry with which youth is defending our lives and homes?

To those who are unmoved by these considerations we can talk the language of the hardest realism. To try to imitate or outdo Nazi frightfulness may lose us the war. In order to win we must rally to our side a large body of opinion both on the continent of Europe and in the rest of the world. To suppose that we can win without this is mere wishful thinking. Mr. Bevin the other day contrasted the 17,000,000 workers in this country with the 130,000,000 under German rule. The only means by which we can redress this inequality is by dividing the forces of the enemy and reinforcing our own resources from outside. To do that we must convince the outside world—and it still needs convincing—that we stand for something fundamentally different from the Nazis. Hitler has understood better than we have the relation of ideas to military success. He has made more of a bad cause than we have done of a good one. To win the war we must wage it with brains. We must be intelligent enough to see that in order to hold and secure the indispensable support of America, of the dependent parts of this Empire, of the peoples on the Continent, we must persuade them by our acts as well as our words that what we are fighting for is not simply our own preservation but something that belongs to the good of mankind as a whole.

CHRISTMAS 1940

Enclosed with this issue of the News-Letter you will find our Christmas Gift Leaflet for 1940. Our last season's Christmas gift idea met with a remarkable response. Though the News-Letter was only six weeks old at the time, our members sent it as a Christmas greeting to over 1,300 of their friends in many parts of the world. We feel justified in repeating the suggestion and believe that many among our enlarged membership will be glad to take advantage of it.

The issue which will reach our members a day or two before Christmas will be neither a letter nor an ordinary Supplement. The Archbishop of York has looked with fresh eyes at the birth in Bethlehem and has related this to the thought that is uppermost in the minds of all peoples today, whatever form of expression it may take, of a new order of society. He has vividly set down for us what he has seen and his contribution has the same outstanding quality as the Christmas letter of last year.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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